

are still struggling with basic necessities. Folks are thousands of dollars behind on the rent and utilities. Their heat, water and power are getting shut off. More than a million Americans on unemployment insurance report that their kids aren't getting enough to eat.

Sometimes the macrostatistics get in the way because the top end is doing very well, the top 10 percent or 25 percent, but so many other people are struggling. And if you just look at a big number, you say: Oh, everything is getting a little better. It is not for the lower half of America. It is not.

I read about one of my constituents recently, Allilsa Fernandez, from Queens, who had a job as a home healthcare aide lined up at the start of the pandemic but couldn't take it because of her family's preexisting medical conditions. Her mother was in the hospital with COVID. Her income went from \$3,400 a month to just \$1,000.

It was a huge, huge loss—

She said.

I have medications, my electric bill, the phone bill, and [the] other costs. Every day you . . . have to make . . . decisions: Am I going to eat?

In America, that should not be the case. It shouldn't be at any time but particularly when an evil disease has robbed our hard-working people of their income, their livelihood.

"Am I going to eat?" And we are supposed to sit here and do nothing? We are supposed to say to Ms. Fernandez, and so many like her, we are not giving you the help you need?

Ms. Fernandez hasn't been able to pay the rent since April of last year, over \$16,000 worth. And this bill will help people like her, but it will also prevent people from getting into Ms. Fernandez's place: people who work for State and local governments who might be laid off, people who work for small businesses who might be laid off.

It is the job of this government, during this evil pandemic, to assist American families, businesses, and workers like Ms. Fernandez until this pandemic is over. It is also our job to prevent others from falling into the same awful situation that Ms. Fernandez finds herself. It is our job to hasten the day when Americans can go back to work, our country can go back to normal, our economy can come roaring back. We can reduce that awfully high actual 10 percent unemployment. That is what the American Rescue Plan will do.

It will send direct checks to American workers and families struggling with the cost of groceries, medicine, and the rent. The vast majority of Americans will get the full \$1,400 we have asked for. It will help reopen schools as quickly and safely as possible. It will help the hardest hit small businesses hang on. It will keep firefighters and teachers and busdrivers and sanitation workers on the job. It will help American families stay in their homes, care for their children, put food on the table, and it will give our country the resources, the vaccina-

tion and testing, that it needs to crush the virus once and for all.

All told, the American Rescue Plan will be one of the largest anti-poverty bills in recent history, cutting child poverty just about in half. The entire country has gotten behind the bill: business leaders, mayors, Governors, from big cities, small towns, Red States, Blue States, Democrat, Republican.

The clear majority of the American people—Democrats, Independents, and Republicans—all support the American Rescue Plan. It seems the only group in America who doesn't support the American Rescue Plan are Washington Republicans.

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle say \$1.9 trillion is too expensive. Well, my Republican colleagues didn't think it was too expensive when they gave nearly the same amount in tax breaks to corporations and the ultrarich in a healthy economy, not one that is struggling.

My colleagues claim this bill isn't related to COVID. What hogwash. It is a strange thing to say because most of the measures in the bill are exactly the same ideas Republicans supported a year ago in the CARES Act, which passed without a single dissenting Republican vote.

Direct checks, in the CARES Act; enhanced unemployment insurance, in the CARES Act; assistance for State and local governments, in the CARES Act; funding for testing and the vaccine, in the CARES Act; aid to schools and small businesses, in the CARES Act. All of them were in the CARES Act, which every Republican voted for, and now they are saying the American Rescue Plan, which has the basic, same structure, is not related to COVID.

When we passed the CARES Act, we all thought that maybe COVID would be gone by the summer. It isn't. We need to keep at it in the same way. Every single Republican who voted for the CARES Act and those ideas a year ago, when a Republican was in the White House and Republicans controlled the Senate, is now saying no, it seems. But now that a Democrat is in the White House, now that Democrats control the Senate, those same ideas, which they supported when Trump was President and McConnell was majority leader, are a liberal wish list—same ideas. Who the heck are they kidding? They have no good answer.

But let's face it, we need to get this done. It would be so much better if we could in a bipartisan way, but we need to get it done.

We are not going to make the same mistake we made after the last economic downturn when Congress did too little to help the Nation rebound, locking us into a long, slow, painful recovery, where it was years before employment was back to where it was before that crisis.

We are not, we are not going to be timid in the face of big challenges. We are not, we are not going to delay when

urgent action is called for. The Senate will move forward today with the American Rescue Plan. There will be a lengthy amendment process, as the rules of the Senate require. The Senate is going to take a lot of votes, but we are going to power through and finish this bill however long it takes. The American people are counting on us, and our Nation depends on it.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT OF 2021

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, today or tonight or tomorrow, Democrats say they will break the bipartisan streak that has defined the pandemic response up until now. They are dead set on ramming through an ideological spending spree packed with non-COVID-related policies.

This is just what a leading House Democrat admitted they would do back at the start of the crisis: Exploit the pandemic as "a tremendous opportunity to restructure things to fit our vision." To give them credit, they never hid the ball. That is how you get a 628-page bill that costs nearly \$2 trillion, but only 9 percent addresses the fight against the virus itself and only 1 percent—1 percent—for the lifesaving vaccines that are ending this nightmare as we speak.

That is how you craft a bill that does nothing to immediately get kids back to classrooms. In fact, that spends only 5 percent of the K-12 school money this fiscal year.

This isn't a pandemic rescue package; it is a parade of leftwing pet projects they are ramming through during a pandemic.

There is a costly ObamaCare bailout that will disproportionately benefit wealthier people; payments to farmers and ranchers based solely on the demographics of the recipient without any regard to actual need; and a massive cash bailout for mismanaged State and local governments, multiple times the size of COVID needs.

Instead of pushing back on the anti-science bullying from Big Labor that is locking kids out of the classrooms, they buy into it.

They want to create generous new benefits for parents who are dealing